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## **Characteristics and Predictors of Coresidential Stability among Couples**

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# Characteristics and Predictors of Coresidential Stability among Couples\*

by  
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## Abstract

Studies documenting economic, social, and even health advantages to stable marriages and quality relationships explain why the indicators and outcomes of long-term relationship stability are of great interest to social scientists. The bulk of research on relationship stability and duration focuses on heterosexual couples. Many same-sex couples maintain long-term relationships akin to marriage, yet little is known about the degree to which these relationships might provide similar advantages to lesbians and gay men. This study uses data from the United States decennial census (2000) to compare demographic, economic, and health differences among non-coupled individuals and those in three different coupling arrangements—different-sex married, different-sex unmarried, and same-sex couples—and explore how these differences correlate and perhaps predict long-term coresidential stability. Findings indicate broad similarity in predictors of stability among different-sex married and same-sex and different-sex unmarried couples. The odds of being in a long-term relationship relative to different-sex married couples are higher for same-sex couples living in states with sexual orientation anti-discrimination laws, suggesting that supportive social and legal climates do impact relationship stability in couples.

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## Introduction

Studies documenting economic, social, and even health advantages to stable marriages and quality relationships explain why the indicators and outcomes of long-term relationship stability are of great interest to social scientists. The bulk of research on relationship stability and duration focuses on heterosexual couples. Many same-sex couples maintain long-term relationships akin to marriage, yet little is known about the degree to which these relationships might provide similar advantages to lesbians and gay men.

This study uses data from the United States decennial census (2000) to compare demographic, economic, and health differences among non-coupled individuals and those in three different coupling arrangements—different-sex married, different-sex unmarried, and same-sex couples—and explore how these differences correlate and perhaps predict long-term coresidential stability. Coresidential stability is measured by determining if partners have lived together in their current home for five years or longer.

## Conceptual Framework

This research involves two types of comparative analysis. First, the analyses consider demographic differences between newly-coupled individuals and those in long-term coresidential relationships. Differences between newly-formed couples and those in long-term relationships provide an intuition about the predictors of stability among different couples. Second, the analyses consider how any observed differences vary by couple type (e.g., different-sex married couples, different-sex unmarried couples, and same-sex couples). Virtually no research using population-based samples has explored if factors that predict stability might differ between same-sex and different-sex couples.

Conceptually, these analyses must take into account at least three somewhat distinct strains of research:

- How long-term duration and stability affects couples or conversely the negative effects of dissolution and divorce
- How marriage associates with specific effects on individuals and couples
- How same-sex couples might differ from their different-sex counterparts.

Relatively large amounts of research have addressed the first two issues. Research on same-sex couples constitutes a smaller body of literature and most studies do not provide conclusions that can be generalized to the population.

### ***Duration and dissolution***

Studies documenting the effects of duration and stability on couples and the impact of dissolution and divorce provide some intuition regarding demographic differences between longer-term duration couples and those in newly-formed relationships. Research has documented how demographic factors like age, race/ethnicity, and education can affect or be affected by long-term and stable relationship duration.

For example, relationships (both marital and non-marital cohabiting) formed between older partners are generally less likely to dissolve than relationships formed between younger partners. Differences in divorce and dissolution have also been shown among racial/ethnic groups. Divorce rates and risks for dissolution are generally higher among African-Americans than among whites or Hispanics. Risk of dissolution is also higher among populations with lower levels of education. Notably, heterogeneity of these characteristics within couples is generally associated with instability and higher rates of dissolution and different-sex married couples show higher levels of homogamy than do unmarried couples. (Blackwell and Lichter, 2004; King and Scott, 2005; Manning 2004; Osbourne et al., 2004; Raley and Bumpass, 2003; Teachman 2002; Tzeng 1992; Martin and Bumpass, 1989).

These studies would suggest that longer-term duration couples will be older, more white, have higher education levels, and show greater homogeneity across the two partners.

The role of children and relationship stability is rather complex. Studies have generally shown that married couples with children are less likely to dissolve their marriage. However, children do not always have a stabilizing effect on marriage. Although first-born children generally have a stabilizing effect, studies have shown that subsequent children have diminished stabilizing effects or even destabilizing effects. Also, stepchildren and children conceived by a couple prior to their marriage both have destabilizing effects. (Wu and Hart, 2001; Lillard and Waite, 1993; Tzeng, 1992; Heaton, 1990). The effect of children on unmarried cohabiting couples is less clear. Manning (2004) finds that children born to couples during cohabitation have neither a stabilizing nor a destabilizing effect. A study of Canadian couples found a stabilizing effect for children on unmarried cohabiting couples (Wu 2000; Wu and Hart, 2001).

### ***Marriage and Cohabitation***

Numerous studies document demographic differences between married and unmarried couples. The age of first marriage has been rising as cohabitation prior to marriage has

become more prevalent (Bumpass and Sweet 1989; Bumpass, et al. 1991; Manning 1995). This suggests that unmarried couples are likely to be younger than their married counterparts. Relationship duration is also shorter in cohabiting relationships (Bumpass and Lu 2000), suggesting that the portion of couples in longer-term relationships will be higher among married couples than among unmarried ones. Given the higher dissolution rates among unmarried couples, it seems reasonable to expect that unmarried couples will exhibit some of the traits associated with dissolution, including higher degrees of heterogeneity in age, education, race/ethnicity, and income.

Numerous studies document that higher income and more highly educated individuals are more likely to enter marriage (Oppenheimer et al. 1997; Clarkberg 1999; Goldstein and Kenney 2001; Sweeney 2002). This suggests that married couples will have higher income and more education than their unmarried counterparts.

### ***Same-sex couples***

Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) offered the first systematic study of the characteristics and dynamics of both same-sex and different-sex couples. Despite significant social and legal changes with regard to homosexuality since the publication of that work, contemporary social science research offers rare and rather cursory analyses into how gay and lesbian people and their families have changed.

The ability to identify cohabiting same-sex couples in the U.S. Census has prompted several studies that describe some of their demographic traits. Black et al. (2000, 2002) show that lesbians are more likely to be raising children and be previously divorced than gay men and that same-sex couples evidence geographic sorting favoring desirable urban areas. Jepsen and Jepsen (2002) compare cohabiting couples from the 1990 U.S. Census and find evidence of the same sort of homogamy for same-sex couples and different-sex couples. In particular, they find that same-sex couples are like different-sex couples in matching partners who are similar in terms of age, education, race, and investment income, though they are generally more heterogeneous than their different-sex counterparts.

Few contemporary studies have explored the formation of same-sex couple relationships and little is known about their overall duration. Consistent with many surveys using non-probability samples (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983; Kurdek, 1988; Kurdek, 1998; Kurdek, 2006), Carpenter and Gates (2006) observe longer duration among same-sex male couples than same-sex female couples.

Several studies observe higher education levels among lesbians and gay men compared to the general population (Black et al. 2000; Badgett 2001; Allegretto and Arthur 2001; Carpenter and Gates 2006). However, for men at least, this does not translate into higher wages as all of those studies also find that gay men have generally lower wages than other men, particularly married ones. Conversely, lesbian wages tend to be higher than those of other women. Carpenter (2005) finds no effects on earnings associated with gay or lesbian sexual orientation. In large part because, regardless of sexual orientation, men tend to have higher earnings than do women, gay male couples are still likely to have higher household incomes than heterosexual couples while one would expect lesbian couples to have relatively lower household incomes.

These characteristics might provide some insights into how longer-term duration same-sex couples might differ from newly-formed couples if one assumes that the traits associated with duration and stability do not vary between same-sex and different-sex couples. For example, since partner homogamy tends to reduce divorce risk, Jepsen and Jepsen (2002) findings would suggest greater separation risk among same-sex couples who show greater heterogeneity of traits than their different-sex counterparts. More recent data from Census 2000 also support that conclusion. For instance, 5.7 percent of married couples are interracial, while 11.5 percent of male same-sex couples and 10.0 percent of female couples are interracial (Simmons and O'Connell, 2003). Curiously, 12.2 percent of different-sex unmarried partners were interracial.

Assuming that predictors of stability and duration among different-sex couples can be applied to same-sex couples may not be completely valid given the vastly different social and legal climates under which same-sex and different-sex couples form and sustain their relationships. For example, Kurdek (2004) and Seltzer (2004) suggest that generally lower duration among same-sex couples can be partially explained by a lack of legal and social barriers to exit from the relationship—barriers associated in large part with marriage.

It is important to remember that “same-sex couples” include couples who would marry if they could and those who would not, regardless of availability. Limited data exists to determine the ratio of same-sex couples who would choose to marry if they could to those who do not, but evidence does suggest that the proportion of same-sex couples who do not marry may be higher than the similar proportion among different-sex couples of ten percent. Badgett and Sears (2005) have calculated the percentage of same-sex couples registering or marrying by

comparing the numbers of registrations or marriages among same-sex couples in Vermont, California, and Massachusetts to the counts of same-sex couples in those states from Census 2000. In Vermont, 57% of same-sex couples have entered civil unions since 2000. Over roughly the same period, 41% of California's same-sex couples have entered domestic partnerships, and 43% of same-sex couples in Massachusetts married in the first two years of that option.

Given the still relatively high level of social stigma attached to homosexuality, it is likely that even married or registered same-sex couples may not get the same kind of social support as different-sex couples receive (Kurdek, 2004; Solomon et al., 2004). For example, same-sex couples have fewer children and are less likely to own homes than are different-sex couples (Sears, et al. 2005)—traits that might be associated with increased the risk of divorce. However, teasing out the causal relationships within the complex legal and social constraints associated with same-sex coupling can be difficult. Perhaps same-sex couples have fewer children and homes because they cannot marry. Marriage might stabilize expectations of a relationship—and provide some security of a claim on property if it ends—making children and houses more likely and divorce eventually less likely.

One key contribution of this research is to begin to describe some of the traits associated with longer-term duration among same-sex couples and consider the extent to which they mimic those observed in different-sex couples. The analysis will also consider differences between newly-formed couples and those with longer durations and ascertain if these patterns vary by couple type. In doing so, this primarily descriptive analysis can perhaps help to guide better theoretical development that considers the complex ways in which social support and legal recognition might change the dynamics of same-sex coupling and family formation.

## Data and Methodology

Data for these analyses are drawn from the United States 2000 Decennial Census. Specifically, estimates of characteristics of the same-sex unmarried partner population are derived from a combined 5% and 1% Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). The two PUMS samples represent independent draws from the responses to the census long-form. Estimates of characteristics of different-sex couples, both married and unmarried partners, are derived from the 1% PUMS.

The census household roster includes a number of relationship categories to define how individuals in a household are related to the householder (the person filling out the form).

These fall into two broad categories: related persons (e.g., husband/wife, son/daughter, brother/sister), and unrelated persons (e.g., unmarried partner, housemate/roommate, roomer/boarder, and other nonrelative). If the householder designates another adult of the same sex as his or her “unmarried partner” or “husband/wife”, the household counts as a same-sex unmarried partner household. These same-sex couples are commonly understood to be primarily gay and lesbian couples (Black et al. 2000) even though the census does not ask any questions about sexual orientation, sexual behavior, or sexual attraction—three common ways used to identify gay men and lesbians in surveys.

### ***Measurement error among same-sex couples***

There are several selection bias and measurement error issues associated with the same-sex unmarried partner data that could affect estimates derived from the full sample of same-sex couples. One issue involves same-sex couples who might be reluctant to identify as such. Concerns about confidentiality may lead some same-sex couples to indicate a status that would not provide evidence of the true nature of their relationship. Other couples may believe that “unmarried partner” or “husband/wife” does not accurately describe their relationship. A study of undercount issues relating to same-sex unmarried partners in Census 2000 indicates that these were the two most common reasons that gay and lesbian couples chose not to designate themselves as unmarried partners (Badgett and Rogers 2003).

An unfortunate measurement error issue creates another source of bias in this sample. In the 1990 U.S. census, the Census Bureau edited a household record that includes a same-sex “husband/wife” such that, in most cases, the sex of the husband or wife was changed and the couple became a different-sex married couple in publicly released data (Black et al., 2000). This decision is reasonable if most of the same-sex husbands and wives were a result of the respondent checking the wrong sex for either him- or her-self or his or her spouse. In Census 2000, officials decided that some same-sex couples may consider themselves married, regardless of legal recognition. As a result, these records were altered such that the same-sex “husband/wife” was recoded as an “unmarried partner.”

This process inadvertently creates a measurement error issue. Some very small fraction of the different-sex couples likely make an error when completing the census form and miscode the sex of one of the partners. Under Census 2000 editing procedures, all these miscoded couples would be included in the counts of same-sex unmarried partners. Because the ratio between different-sex married couples and same-sex couples is so large (roughly 90 to 1), even



a small fraction of sex miscoding among different-sex married couples adds a sizable fraction of them to the same-sex unmarried-partner population, possibly distorting some demographic characteristics.

Black et al. (2006) propose a method for at least identifying the direction of the bias when considering various demographic characteristics of same-sex couples. Same-sex unmarried partner households where one member of the couple was identified as “husband/wife” are the “at-risk” group for this form of measurement error. There is no simple way to identify this group, but one way to isolate same-sex “spouses” is to consider the marital status variable allocation flag (a variable indicating that the original response had been changed). Census Bureau officials confirm that their editing procedures altered the marital status of any unmarried partners who said they were “currently married.” Changes in marital status occurred after editing all of the same-sex “husbands” and “wives” into the “unmarried partner” category. A large portion of the same-sex unmarried partners who had their marital status allocated likely originally responded that they were “currently married” given that one of the partners was a “husband/wife.”<sup>1</sup> Same-sex partners who have not had their marital status variable allocated are likely free of significant measurement error. As such, the analyses include estimates among same-sex couples who have not had their marital statuses allocated.

While this procedure greatly reduces the measurement error within the same-sex couple sample, it also likely leaves out same-sex couples who actually consider themselves married. These couples may differ in systematic ways from those who do not identify themselves as married. A weighted average approach can be used to produce estimates that incorporate the presence of same-sex married couples.

There are several steps to this approach. First is to estimate the portion of same-sex couples identified originally as married couples. Same-sex couples with a double marital status allocation are largely comprised of two groups: same-sex couples who identified as married and sex-miscoded different-sex married couples. Estimating the “true” number of same-sex couples ( $SS_{mar}$ ) who identified themselves as married involves using Eq. 1, subtracting the total number of different-sex married couples ( $DS_{mar}$ ) multiplied by an error rate ( $\epsilon$ ) from the number of same-sex couples with dual marital status allocations ( $SS_{alloc}$ ). The choice of error rate is

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<sup>1</sup> Using internal files to compare same-sex unmarried partners with an without marital status allocation, Census bureau officials find that ten percent of couples where both partners have a marital status allocation did not actually have their relationship status changed from “husband/wife” to unmarried partner, and conversely approximately 10-15 percent of the couples that were edited in this fashion are not included in those with a marital status allocation. Thanks to Martin O’Connell and Jason Fields at the US Census Bureau for this analysis.

challenging as little is known about the error rate associated with married couples miscoding the sex of a partner. Using findings from a Census study (O'Connell and Gooding 2006) that considered name-matching by sex to identify possible sex miscodes among different couples types, Black et al. (2006) find that a plausible error rate is about 3.8 households per thousand (0.0038).

$$SS_{mar} = SS_{alloc} - \epsilon DS_{mar} \quad \text{Eq. 1}$$

The proportion of "true" same-sex married couples among the sample of same-sex couples with a dual marital status allocation ( $\gamma$ ) can then be determined using Eq. 2.

$$\gamma = \frac{SS_{mar}}{SS_{alloc}} \quad \text{Eq. 2}$$

For any characteristic  $y$ , the mean of the full sample of same-sex couples with a double marital status allocation can be represented as Eq. 3., a weighted average of the "true" mean among same-sex married couples and the observed mean for different-sex married couples (assuming that sex miscoding is random among married couples).

$$\bar{y}_{SSalloc} = \gamma \bar{y}_{SSmar} + (1 - \gamma) \bar{y}_{DSmar} \quad \text{Eq. 3}$$

The mean for same-sex married couples can be easily calculated since all other variables in Eq. 3 are known.

A mean for the full sample of same-sex couples can be estimated as a weighted average of the mean of same-sex couples without any marital status allocations ( $SS_{ump}$ ) and the mean for same-sex married couples ( $SS_{mar}$ ) using Eq. 4. Dividing  $SS_{mar}$  by the sum of  $SS_{mar}$  and  $SS_{ump}$  derives the weighting variable  $\theta$ .

$$\bar{y}_{SStot} = (1 - \theta) \bar{y}_{SSump} + \theta \bar{y}_{SSmar} \quad \text{Eq. 4}$$

One drawback to this approach is that it only applies to couple-level statistics and cannot be used to estimate traits separately for male and female couples. To apply this model to either male or female couples would require knowing the differential rates by which men and women within married couples miscode either their own sex or the sex of their spouses. Since such an error rate cannot be credibly obtained, couple-level estimates for male or female same-sex couples will be shown only for those couples where both partners do not have a marital status allocation.

### ***Measuring coresidential stability***

Census enumerations do not include questions about the duration of relationships for couples. However, respondents are asked if they lived in their current house five years ago. Respondents who did not live in their current house five years ago were also asked where they did live at that time and that Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA) code is recorded in the PUMS.<sup>2</sup> These questions can be used to divide couples into three distinct groups as follows:

1. Long-term coresidential relationship (duration of five years or more): Both partners lived in the same house together five years ago
2. Newly formed coresidential relationship (duration of less than five years): Both partners did not live together in the same house five years ago. This group can be identified in two ways:
  - One partner lived in the current house five years ago and the other did not
  - The two partners did not live in the same PUMA five years ago
3. Unknown coresidential duration: All remaining couples

The group with unknown coresidential duration comprises couples in which both partners have moved in the last five years and are a mix of couples with both long-term and short-term coresidential durations.

The samples of couples for whom coresidential duration can be determined may be biased as the coresidential duration for approximately a third of couples is unknown. There is no simple way to ascertain how this bias might affect the analyses as it is impossible to determine how couples in newly-formed or long-term coresidential relationships within the unknown sample might differ from those whose coresidential duration is known.

The bias likely primarily relates to how mobile couples might differ from couples who have not moved in the past five years. The unknown coresidential duration sample is entirely comprised of couples where both partners moved to new locations in the past five years. Couples with a long-term coresidential duration are comprised completely of those who have not moved in the past five years. They may differ demographically from couples who have had long-term duration but moved together in the past five years. Biased estimates occur if the predictors and correlates of coresidential stability vary based on mobility.

The analyses will include both bivariate and multivariate approaches and consider differences among those in the various couple types who are in newly-formed and long-term

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<sup>2</sup> PUMAs are the lowest level of geography available in the PUMS.

duration relationships. Bivariate analyses of same-sex couples (combined male and female) will use the adjustment procedure described above. Separate analyses of same-sex male and female couples and multivariate analyses will limit the same-sex couple sample to those where both partners do not have a marital status allocation. Demographic characteristics considered are those generally found to have important associations with stability in relationships and include:

- Age: average age of the couple
- Race/ethnicity: both partners are white, African-American, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and other
- Education: both partners have at least a college degree
- Presence of the child under age 18 in the home
- Household income
- Disability (as a proxy for health): at least one partner is disabled

Another set of metrics will explore demographic heterogeneity within the couple. These include:

- Racial/ethnic difference
- Personal income difference
- Age difference

Multivariate analyses will use a logistic estimation procedure to predict the effect of the characteristics described above on long-term coresidential duration. The specification will also control for geographic location (by the nine Census “divisions”) and include indicator variables for couple type (different-sex unmarried, same-sex male, and same-sex female) with married couples as the reference group.

## Findings

### *Measurement error among same-sex couples*

Recall that the full sample of same-sex couples is likely contaminated with different-sex married couples and this contamination is minimized by restricting the same-sex couples to those where both partners do not have a marital status allocation. The procedure outlined in the Data and Methodology section adjusts sample estimates to incorporate information from same-sex couples who identified as married.

Characteristics of the full sample, couples without marital status allocations, and estimates using the adjustment procedure are shown in Table 1. Many of the differences between the full sample and the sample without a marital status allocation evidence contamination with married couples, though this is not true for all characteristics. Clear evidence of contamination comes if the adjustment moves the estimate derived from the couples without a marital status allocation closer to that observed among married couples. This is true for the following characteristics:

- Age (married couples are older)
- Interracial/ethnic (married couples less likely)
- Both have a college degree (married couples less likely)
- Child in the home (married couples more likely)
- Household income (married couples lower)
- Age differences (married couples closer in age)

It is not true for these traits:

- Race/ethnicity (adjustment decreases white among same-sex couples while married couples are more white)
- Home ownership (adjustment decreases ownership rate among same-sex couples while married couples have higher rates)
- Disability (adjustment substantially increases rates of disability while rates in married couples do not differ)
- Income difference (adjustment decreases income differences while married couples have higher differences)

These discrepancies point to the difficulty of developing unbiased estimates of the traits of same-sex couples. The somewhat conflicting patterns could be a result of not accurately assessing the error rate of sex miscoding among married couples. Perhaps more likely is that in some cases same-sex couples who consider themselves to be married share the general characteristics of different-sex married couples while in other cases (race/ethnicity perhaps), they actually differ. If same-sex married couples are actually more likely to be non-white than their different-sex counterparts, then the adjustment simply reflects that difference rather than indicating a problem in the adjustment procedure.

### ***Demographic differences across couple types***

Same-sex couples and different-sex married and unmarried couples exhibit a number of demographic differences as shown in Table 1. Notably for these analyses, the married couples have the highest rates of long-term coresidential duration followed by same-sex couples and then different-sex unmarried couples. This is one of several traits that suggest that same-sex couples are actually a mix of couples whose characteristics are more akin to different-sex unmarried couples and some who appear to resemble different-sex married couples. As such, their characteristics often fall in the “middle” of those for different-sex married and unmarried couples. This is true for age. Married couples are the oldest, followed by same-sex couples and then different-sex unmarried couples. The same pattern holds for home ownership (married couples have the highest rates) and income differences (married couples have the highest).

Same-sex couples are more likely than different-sex married or unmarried couples to be non-white, interracial/ethnic, both have a college degree, have one partner disabled, and have larger differences in age. They also have the highest household incomes (though the difference is not significant with different-sex married couples). Notably, all of these differences by couple type exist among both those in newly-formed relationships and those with longer-term durations (as demonstrated in Table 2).

### ***Demographic differences by coresidential duration***

Findings from Table 2 show bivariate differences between newly-formed couples who have coresidential duration of less than five years and those who have been together for five or more years. There are also differences in these patterns among couple types. Characteristics that are significantly different by coresidential duration for all couples include:

- Age: those with long-term duration are older
- Home ownership: rates are higher among those with long-term duration
- Disability: rates are higher among those with long-term duration

Couples with long-term duration are also less likely to be inter-racial or ethnic, though not significantly so for same-sex couples.

Patterns of difference by coresidential duration vary among couple types for the following characteristics:

- While different sex married couples who have long-term coresidential duration are more likely to be both white, there are not significant differences in this characteristic for same-sex or different-sex unmarried couples.
- While duration is negatively associated with both partners having a college degree for different-sex couples, there is not a significant difference among same-sex couples.
- Perhaps in part a function of age, different-sex unmarried couples with long-term duration are more likely to have children than those in newly-formed relationships while the opposite is true for married couples (no difference is observed for same-sex couples).
- Only among different-sex married couples is duration associated with significantly higher household income.
- Duration is associated with greater homogeneity in age for different-sex married couples but not so for same-sex or different-sex unmarried couples, who actually show higher rates of heterogeneity, though the differences are mostly not significant.

### ***Demographic differences between male and female same-sex couples***

As shown in Table 3, differences in demographics associated with duration are essentially the same for male and female couples. However, there are general demographic differences between these couples, regardless of coresidential duration. These include:

- Male couples are more likely to be interracial/ethnic.
- Female couples are more likely to have a child in the home.
- Male couples have higher household incomes.
- Female couples have higher home ownership rates.
- Male couples are more heterogeneous in income.

Male and female couples share many patterns with regard to coresidential duration, though not all are similar for different-sex couples. Like other couples, duration is positively associated with age. Same-sex male and female couples with long-term duration are also more likely to be both white, less likely to be interracial/ethnic, have higher household incomes and income differences, own their home, and include at least one disabled partner. Unlike their different-sex counterparts, age heterogeneity is not associated at all with duration for male

couples and fewer differences are observed for female couples (though like different-sex unmarried couples, they are more likely to have an age difference of more than 20 years).

## ***Multivariate results***

### **Full Sample**

Findings from logit estimations in which long-term duration is predicted by the various demographic characteristics already described show that controlling for the demographic characteristics actually increases the differences in the likelihood of being in a long-term duration couple between different-sex married couples and same-sex and different-sex unmarried couples. This is shown in Figure 1. While same-sex male and female couples are about half as likely to be in a long-term duration relationship as different-sex married couples in the bivariate estimates, the logit estimation increases that difference substantially to an odds-ratio of 0.30 for male couples and 0.23 for female couples. Similarly the odds of a different-sex unmarried couple being in a long-term relationship decreases from 0.37 to just 0.16. Notably, controlling for demographic characteristics reveals differences in duration between male and female same-sex couples that were not present in the bivariate analysis.

The odds-ratios from the logit estimations are shown in Table 4. Estimates were made using the full sample with controls for couple type and were conducted separately for each couple type. The findings reveal that the following factors are positively associated with being in a long-term relationship for all couples:

- Age
- Home ownership
- Having children (though somewhat different for SS)

Age difference was the only factor negatively associated with being in a long-term relationship for all couples.

One factor had opposite effects for different-sex and same-sex couples. Both partners having a college degree is negatively associated with duration for different-sex couples but not so for same-sex couples. There were also differences in predictive factors between different-sex married couples and other couples:

- Both partners being African-American is positively associated with duration for same-sex and different-sex unmarried couples and has a negative association for different-sex married couples



- Both partners being Asian/Pacific Islander is negatively associated with duration for different-sex married and not so for the other couple types
- Racial/ethnic difference between partners is negatively associated with duration for different-sex married and not so for the other couple types
- Income difference is negatively associated with duration for same-sex female couples and not so for others

Finally, the logistic estimations reveal some differences between same-sex male and female couples. Being an inter-racial or ethnic couple and having at least one disabled partner only has a negative impact on duration for male couples. Household income is negatively associated with duration for men and not so for women and personal income difference is negatively associated with duration for women and not so for men.

### **Age cohorts**

One interesting question is whether the patterns shown in the logistic estimations vary by age cohorts. To consider this issue, a logistic estimation using the full sample of couples with indicators for couple type was conducted within age cohorts. Findings from that series of estimations are illustrated in Figure 2. They show that differences in duration between different-sex married couples and the other couple types increase with age. Among the couples with an average age in their 20s, the odds-ratio of being in a long-term coresidential relationship (relative to different-sex married couples) for same-sex male couples is 0.43 and falls to 0.21 for couples in their 60s. The biggest decrease occurs between the 20s and the 30s. This same pattern basically holds for different-sex unmarried couples, though they have uniformly lower odds of being in a long-term relationship. Same-sex female couples have lower odds of long-term duration than do male couples and those odds relative to different-sex married couples are similar for couples in their 20s and 30s and then decline fairly gradually in older age cohorts.

### **Social/Legal Climate**

Findings shown in Table 4 demonstrate that social and legal climate play a role in predicting relationship duration for unmarried couples, both same- and different-sex. Odds-ratios on the indicator variables for location differ by couple type. Most notably, regional indicators are more likely to be significant for same-sex and different-sex unmarried couples than for their married counterparts. For same-sex couples, the odds of being in a long-duration

couple increases in the more socially progressive regions in the north and on the pacific coast while the odds decrease in the more socially conservative south. The odds of being in a long-duration couple are also lower for different-sex unmarried partners in the south.

At the time of the 2000 Census, no states had passed either civil union or marriage legislation that gave same-sex couples an option for legal recognition similar to that offered to their heterosexual counterparts.<sup>3</sup> However, at that time twelve states had enacted legislation making discrimination based on sexual orientation illegal in public or private employment. Such legislation provides an indicator of a generally more supportive social climate for same-sex couples and perhaps also for different-sex unmarried couples. One might expect that the odds of being in a long-term relationship (relative to different-sex married couples) would be higher for same-sex and different-sex unmarried partners in states with a more support social climate. In fact, this is exactly the case, as shown in Figure 3. The odds of an unmarried couple being in a long-term duration partnership relative to married couples are higher in states with a sexual orientation anti-discrimination statute. Perhaps not surprisingly, the magnitude of the difference between states with and without such statutes is larger for same-sex couples than for their different-sex unmarried counterparts.

## Discussion

The correlates and predictors of long-term duration are remarkably similar regardless of the marital status or the sex of the partners. The effect of race and ethnicity on duration marks one notable difference between married and unmarried partners, both same-sex and different-sex. For example, consistent with literature on the subject, having two partners who are African-American decreases the odds of being in a long-term duration relationship for different-sex married couples. That pattern is reversed for same-sex and different-sex unmarried couples. Another interesting result shows that being an inter-racial or ethnic couple does not impact the odds of being in a long-term relationship for different-sex unmarried couples or same-sex female couples. A negative impact is observed for different-sex married couples and same-sex male couples. These findings speak to the interactions among the social and cultural dynamics of marriage and relationship formation by race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

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<sup>3</sup> The Vermont Civil Union statute, the first of its kind in the United States, went into effect on 1 July 2000.

They offer interesting fodder for more detailed analyses that consider these complex interactions and how they might affect relationship stability and duration.

The similarity of most predictors and correlates of long-term duration across couple types suggests that both the selection into long-term relationships and the dynamics of those relationships have similar characteristics for heterosexual and homosexual couples. That finding is consistent with Andersson et al. (2006), who show that the predictors of divorce and dissolution of relationships in Scandinavia are quite similar for same-sex and different-sex couples. Andersson et al. (2006) also observed a generally higher divorce risk among same-sex couples, particularly female couples. Consistent with this finding, these analyses show that same-sex couples, and even more so female couples, are less likely than their married different-sex counterparts to be in long-term relationships.

Findings from the logistic regression estimates demonstrate that demographic characteristics alone do not explain the difference in long-term duration probabilities between same-sex and different-sex married couples. There are clear age cohort differences. Younger non-married couples have higher odds of long-term duration relative to their married counterparts than do older cohorts. Most surveys find that age is negatively associated with supportive attitudes toward homosexuality. It could be that younger gay and lesbian couples have more supportive families and friends than their older counterparts. This could contribute to an environment that produces more stable and longer-term duration relationships.

One notable difference between same-sex and different-sex couples involves the availability of the legal and social supports associated with marriage. The finding that same-sex couples have improved odds of being in a long-term duration relationship in states with sexual orientation anti-discrimination states provides fairly strong evidence of a link between supportive public policies and stability for same-sex couple relationships. Combine this with the general finding that all couples share similar predictors associated with long-term duration and it seems reasonable to conclude that, as more states enact legislation that formally recognizes same-sex couples, they will likely share in the well-documented benefits associated with marriage.

## **Conclusion**

These findings illustrate the demographic similarities of relationship formation and duration between same-sex and different-sex couples while also demonstrating the unique position of marriage in society. One of the reasons Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) choose to

include same-sex couples in their landmark study was that same-sex couples provide a counterfactual for considering the roles of gender and social conditions in the relationship dynamics of different-sex couples. In that spirit, this study offers perspectives on the unique impacts of marriage and how its absence might affect couples. Comparisons between unmarried and married different-sex couples provide limited insights in this regard as unmarried couples are comprised in large part of couples who will likely marry in the future. The same-sex couples in these data provide a stronger counterfactual as none have the option for legal marriage in the United States. We know that marriage provides both a social and legal environment that effects entry and exit from relationships. These findings relating to same-sex couples strongly suggest that relationships would be shorter and less stable in the absence of marriage. Conversely, they suggest that marriage would likely stabilize and create positive outcomes for same-sex couples.

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Table 1. Demographic characteristics of couples, United States.

	Same-sex			Different-sex married		Different-sex unmarried	
	Full Sample	No Marital Status Allocation	Adjusted				
<b>Coresidential stability</b>							
< 5 years	0.278	0.361	0.380	0.087	**	0.386	
5 years +	0.387	0.279	0.279	0.586	**	0.182	**
Unknown	0.336	0.359	0.340	0.327		0.433	**
<b>Average Age</b>							
20s	0.150	0.170	0.177	0.100	**	0.381	**
30s	0.320	0.367	0.364	0.236	**	0.299	**
40s	0.269	0.288	0.277	0.255		0.199	**
50s	0.134	0.110	0.106	0.187	**	0.081	**
60s plus	0.127	0.066	0.076	0.222	**	0.040	**
<b>Both partners</b>							
White	0.667	0.693	0.573	0.755	**	0.622	**
African-Am.	0.093	0.069	0.109	0.062	**	0.117	
Hispanic	0.093	0.061	0.101	0.077	**	0.098	
API	0.017	0.008	0.010	0.032	**	0.010	
AIAN	0.003	0.002	0.003	0.002		0.005	*
Other	0.008	0.006	0.009	0.006		0.006	
Inter-racial/ethnic	0.120	0.161	0.149	0.066	**	0.141	
Both college degree	0.204	0.270	0.225	0.166	**	0.089	**
Child in home	0.327	0.188	0.242	0.485	**	0.488	**
Household Income	74,439	81,893	74,607	74,126		54,929	**
Own Home	0.654	0.605	0.568	0.813	**	0.435	**
At least one disabled	0.324	0.282	0.343	0.289		0.283	
Income difference	25,353	26,388	23,089	29,559	**	18,688	**
Age difference							
<5 years	0.653	0.576	0.603	0.747	**	0.656	**
5-10 years	0.211	0.239	0.227	0.181	**	0.218	
10-20 years	0.106	0.138	0.128	0.066	**	0.111	
20 years+	0.030	0.047	0.043	0.007	**	0.014	**
N	77,114	39,958	77,114	112,998		87,730	
* Significantly different from Same-sex (adjusted) at the p<0.05 level ** Significantly different from Same-sex (adjusted) at the p<0.01 level							



Table 2. Demographic characteristics among couples by coresidential duration status, United States.

	<5 year				5 years+							
	Same-sex (adj)	Different-sex Married	Different-sex Unmarried		Same-sex (adj)		Different-sex Married			Different-sex Unmarried		
Average Age												
20s	0.243	0.274 **	0.415 **		0.043 ++		0.020 ++	*		0.086 ++	**	
30s	0.391	0.310 **	0.310 **		0.264 ++		0.160 ++	**		0.262 ++		
40s	0.220	0.190 **	0.178 **		0.371 ++		0.280 ++	**		0.332 ++		
50s	0.074	0.114 **	0.069		0.188 ++		0.236 ++			0.192 ++		
60s plus	0.072	0.112 **	0.027 **		0.135 +		0.303 ++	**		0.127 ++		
Both Partners												
White	0.632	0.678 **	0.648		0.583		0.795 ++	**		0.611 ++		
African-Am.	0.090	0.076	0.101		0.159 ++		0.061 ++	**		0.143 ++		
Hispanic	0.092	0.095	0.077		0.112		0.062 ++	**		0.118 ++		
API	0.011	0.041 **	0.012		0.012		0.025 ++			0.008 ++		
AIAN	0.002	0.001	0.005 **		0.004		0.003 ++			0.011 ++		
Other	0.009	0.008	0.006		0.012		0.005 ++			0.006		
Inter-racial/ethnic	0.166	0.101 **	0.154		0.119		0.049 ++	**		0.104 ++		
Both college degree	0.215	0.187 *	0.118 **		0.226		0.148 ++	**		0.060 ++	**	
Child in home	0.241	0.496 **	0.404 **		0.234		0.414 ++	**		0.419 +	**	
Household income	72,446	69,824	59,228		78,345		75,354	++		58,196		**
Own home	0.519	0.670 **	0.425 **		0.703 ++		0.907 ++	**		0.660 ++	**	
At least one disabled	0.316	0.259 **	0.261 **		0.414 ++		0.319 ++	**		0.378 ++		
Income difference	23,279	27,140 **	20,167 **		22,977		28,229	++		19,517 +		
Age difference												
<5 years	0.590	0.690 **	0.644 **		0.590		0.744 ++	**		0.586 ++		
5-10 years	0.229	0.211	0.228		0.225		0.184 ++			0.242 +		
10-20 years	0.136	0.087 **	0.112 *		0.124		0.066 ++	**		0.148 ++		
20 years+	0.045	0.012 **	0.016 **		0.061		0.006 ++	**		0.024 ++	**	

\* Significantly different from Same-sex (adjusted) at the p<0.05 level  
 \*\* Significantly different from Same-sex (adjusted) at the p<0.01 level  
 + Significantly different from <5 years at the p<0.05 level  
 ++ Significantly different from <5 years at the p<0.01 level

Table 3. Demographic characteristics among same-sex couples<sup>a</sup> by sex and coresidential duration status, United States.

	<5 year			5 years+				
	Female	Male		Female		Male		
Average Age								
20s	0.258	0.245		0.026	++	0.030	++	
30s	0.383	0.449	**	0.228	++	0.238	++	
40s	0.228	0.217		0.398	++	0.397	++	
50s	0.071	0.057	**	0.200	++	0.211	++	
60s plus	0.060	0.032	**	0.148	++	0.125	++	**
Both Partners								
White	0.688	0.648	**	0.728	++	0.725	++	
African-Am.	0.089	0.055	**	0.091		0.063		**
Hispanic	0.055	0.066	*	0.059		0.054	++	
API	0.007	0.006		0.013	++	0.007		**
AIAN	0.002	0.002		0.003		0.005	+	
Other	0.007	0.008		0.004		0.006	+	
Inter-racial/ethnic	0.152	0.215	**	0.103	++	0.140	++	**
Both college degree	0.251	0.252		0.299	++	0.283	++	
Child in home	0.267	0.115	**	0.244	++	0.098	++	**
Household income	66,153	86,139	**	81,121	++	99,219	++	**
Own home	0.528	0.509	**	0.793	++	0.754	++	**
At least one disabled	0.288	0.267	**	0.332	++	0.292	++	**
Income difference	20,176	28,531	**	24,502	++	32,237	++	**
Age difference								
<5 years	0.582	0.537	**	0.563	+	0.529		**
5-10 years	0.244	0.243		0.236		0.252		
10-20 years	0.124	0.166	**	0.130		0.160		**
20 years+	0.049	0.054		0.072	++	0.060		**

<sup>a</sup>Same-sex couples include only those where both partners do not have a marital status allocation

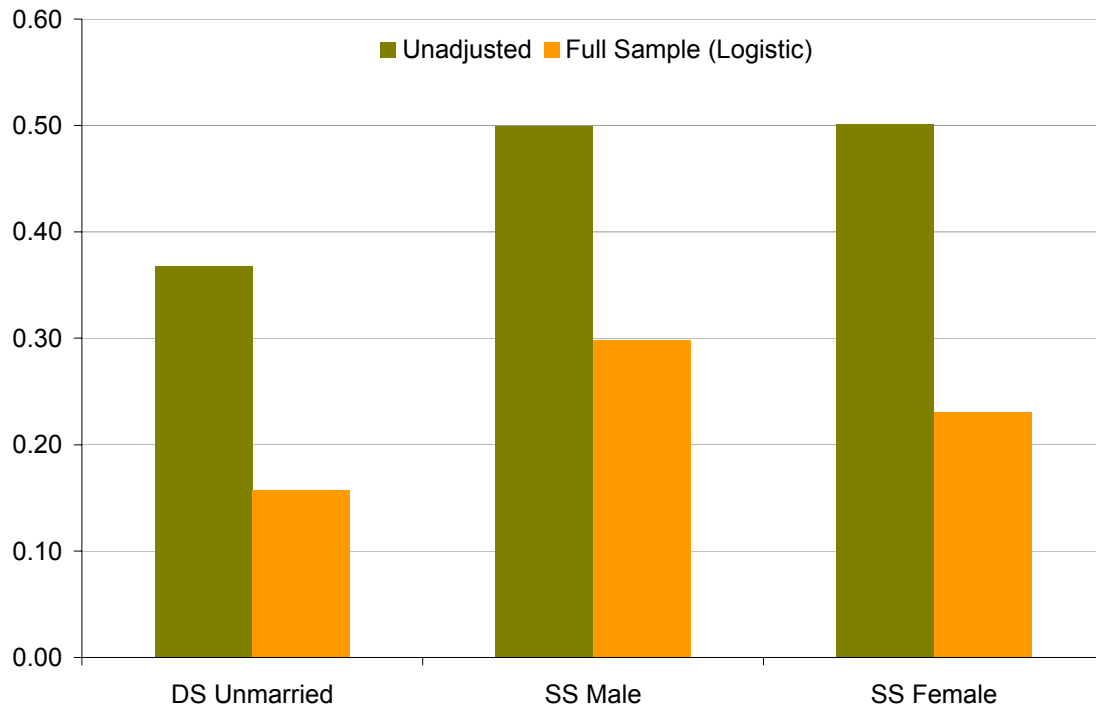
\* Significantly different from Female at the p<0.05 level  
 \*\* Significantly different from Female at the p<0.01 level  
 + Significantly different from <5 years at the p<0.05 level  
 ++ Significantly different from <5 years at the p<0.01 level

Table 4. Logit estimations (odds-ratios) of the effect of relationship characteristics on coresidential duration (5 years or more) for couples, United States.

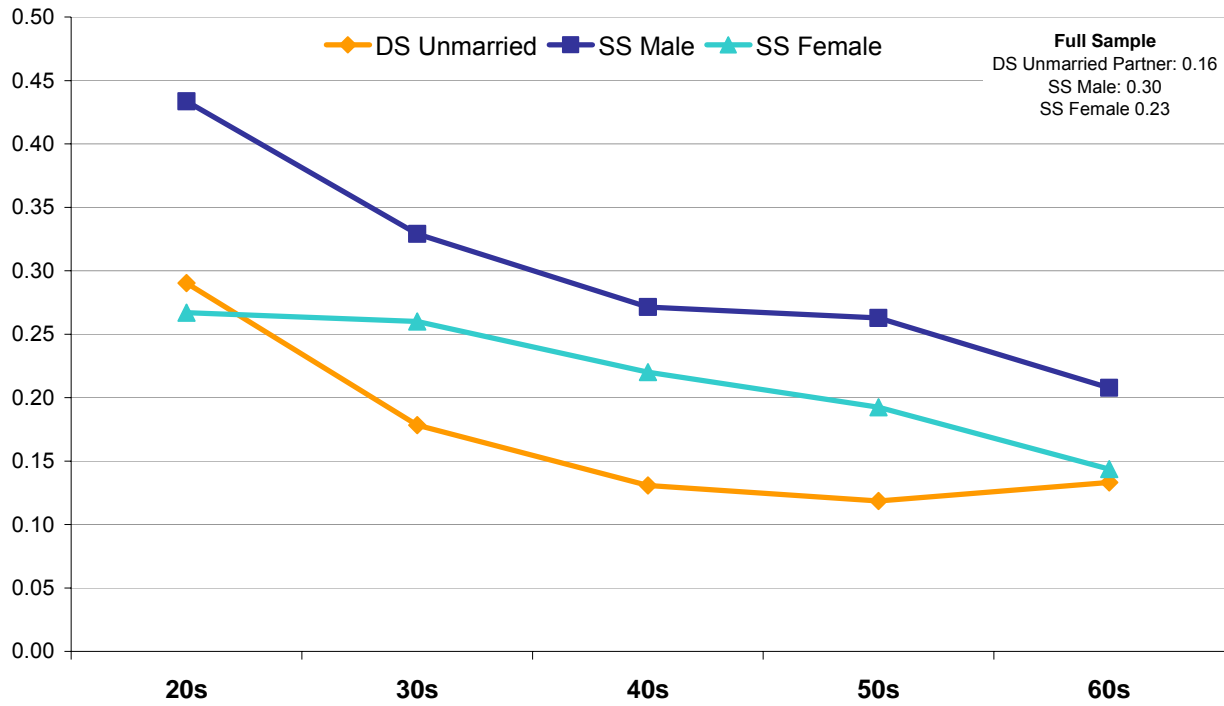
Dependent variable: Together for 5+ years	All Couples		Same-sex couples		Same-sex female couples		Same-sex male couples		Different-sex married couples		Different-sex unmarried couples	
		p> t	SS only	p> t	SSF	p> t	SSM	p> t	Mar	p> t	DSUMP	p> t
Avg Age 30s	<b>4.92</b>	0.000	<b>4.41</b>	0.000	<b>4.71</b>	0.000	<b>4.16</b>	0.000	<b>5.11</b>	0.000	<b>3.63</b>	0.000
Avg Age 40s	<b>16.56</b>	0.000	<b>13.48</b>	0.000	<b>12.93</b>	0.000	<b>14.08</b>	0.000	<b>18.09</b>	0.000	<b>8.68</b>	0.000
Avg Age 50s	<b>31.45</b>	0.000	<b>23.75</b>	0.000	<b>20.45</b>	0.000	<b>27.70</b>	0.000	<b>35.22</b>	0.000	<b>14.11</b>	0.000
Avg Age 60s	<b>45.03</b>	0.000	<b>21.50</b>	0.000	<b>17.38</b>	0.000	<b>27.86</b>	0.000	<b>50.36</b>	0.000	<b>21.97</b>	0.000
Both Af-Am.	<b>0.84</b>	0.000	<b>1.28</b>	0.000	<b>1.43</b>	0.000	1.15	0.217	<b>0.74</b>	0.000	<b>1.67</b>	0.000
Both Hisp.	<b>1.12</b>	0.024	<b>1.37</b>	0.000	<b>1.40</b>	0.002	<b>1.30</b>	0.017	1.04	0.473	<b>2.04</b>	0.000
Both API	<b>0.74</b>	0.000	<b>1.50</b>	0.024	1.41	0.131	1.69	0.071	<b>0.73</b>	0.000	1.07	0.555
Both AI-AN	<b>3.18</b>	0.000	<b>2.22</b>	0.018	1.48	0.261	<b>3.10</b>	0.044	<b>3.71</b>	0.000	<b>3.05</b>	0.000
Both Other race/eth	0.94	0.705	0.95	0.801	0.86	0.663	1.09	0.746	0.93	0.663	<b>1.39</b>	0.020
Both college degree	<b>0.77</b>	0.000	1.00	0.909	1.03	0.635	0.97	0.517	<b>0.76</b>	0.000	<b>0.69</b>	0.000
HH Inc 35-60K	0.97	0.363	<b>0.89</b>	0.026	0.93	0.303	<b>0.83</b>	0.023	1.00	0.985	<b>0.87</b>	0.000
HH Inc 60-90K	0.93	0.070	<b>0.89</b>	0.028	0.97	0.647	<b>0.80</b>	0.004	0.99	0.747	<b>0.67</b>	0.000
HH Inc 90K+	<b>0.82</b>	0.000	0.91	0.077	0.97	0.685	<b>0.83</b>	0.027	<b>0.87</b>	0.002	<b>0.57</b>	0.000
Own Home	<b>2.29</b>	0.000	<b>2.05</b>	0.000	<b>2.18</b>	0.000	<b>1.93</b>	0.000	<b>2.41</b>	0.000	<b>1.80</b>	0.000
One child	<b>1.43</b>	0.000	0.97	0.596	0.98	0.721	0.90	0.304	<b>1.47</b>	0.000	<b>1.19</b>	0.000
Two children	<b>2.76</b>	0.000	<b>1.50</b>	0.000	<b>1.39</b>	0.000	<b>1.64</b>	0.001	<b>2.97</b>	0.000	<b>1.52</b>	0.000
Three+ children	<b>2.85</b>	0.000	<b>1.39</b>	0.001	1.21	0.106	<b>1.73</b>	0.002	<b>3.07</b>	0.000	<b>1.60</b>	0.000
One or both disabled	0.98	0.537	<b>0.92</b>	0.018	0.98	0.643	<b>0.87</b>	0.007	0.97	0.313	<b>1.13</b>	0.000
Inter racial/ethnic	<b>0.72</b>	0.000	<b>0.77</b>	0.000	0.89	0.091	<b>0.70</b>	0.000	<b>0.68</b>	0.000	0.99	0.822
Income diff 2-15K	0.94	0.113	<b>0.88</b>	0.015	<b>0.81</b>	0.002	0.97	0.646	0.95	0.247	<b>0.92</b>	0.020
Income diff 15-35K	0.98	0.546	<b>0.86</b>	0.003	<b>0.80</b>	0.002	0.92	0.256	0.99	0.830	0.97	0.439
Income diff 35K+	0.99	0.833	<b>0.89</b>	0.029	<b>0.85</b>	0.044	0.93	0.392	0.98	0.674	1.02	0.697
Age diff 5-10 years	<b>0.65</b>	0.000	<b>0.87</b>	0.000	<b>0.81</b>	0.000	0.93	0.177	<b>0.64</b>	0.000	<b>0.83</b>	0.000
Age diff 10-20 years	<b>0.49</b>	0.000	<b>0.69</b>	0.000	<b>0.74</b>	0.000	<b>0.66</b>	0.000	<b>0.46</b>	0.000	<b>0.79</b>	0.000
Age diff 20+ years	<b>0.33</b>	0.000	<b>0.66</b>	0.000	<b>0.79</b>	0.013	<b>0.55</b>	0.000	<b>0.28</b>	0.000	<b>0.65</b>	0.000
Middle Atlantic	<b>1.31</b>	0.000	<b>1.33</b>	0.000	<b>1.26</b>	0.014	<b>1.41</b>	0.002	<b>1.35</b>	0.000	1.05	0.409
East North Central	1.04	0.467	<b>1.27</b>	0.001	<b>1.25</b>	0.022	<b>1.30</b>	0.026	1.07	0.320	<b>0.85</b>	0.004
West North Central	1.04	0.596	1.15	0.137	<b>1.33</b>	0.020	0.98	0.884	1.05	0.517	0.92	0.200
South Atlantic	0.95	0.339	<b>0.82</b>	0.005	<b>0.74</b>	0.001	0.90	0.354	1.00	0.998	<b>0.67</b>	0.000
East South Central	1.01	0.937	0.83	0.066	<b>0.73</b>	0.020	0.98	0.891	1.03	0.679	<b>0.85</b>	0.021
West South Central	0.89	0.058	0.89	0.154	0.89	0.250	0.92	0.510	0.92	0.264	<b>0.68</b>	0.000
Mountain	<b>0.84</b>	0.012	<b>0.84</b>	0.045	0.89	0.291	0.78	0.059	0.88	0.117	<b>0.65</b>	0.000
Pacific	0.94	0.315	<b>1.17</b>	0.021	<b>1.26</b>	0.014	<b>1.27</b>	0.030	0.94	0.400	1.00	0.951
DS Unmarried Partner	<b>0.16</b>	0.000										
SS Male Partner	<b>0.30</b>	0.000	<b>1.15</b>	0.000								
SS Female Partner	<b>0.23</b>	0.000										

**Bold** indicates coefficient is significant at the p<0.05 level

**Figure 1. Odds of Long-term Coresidential Duration  
Relative to Different-sex Married Couples**



**Figure 2. Odds of Long-term Coresidential Duration, by age**  
Relative to Different-sex Married Couples



### Figure 3. Odds of Long-term Coresidential Duration

Relative to different-sex married couples  
by the presence of a state sexual orientation anti-discrimination statute

